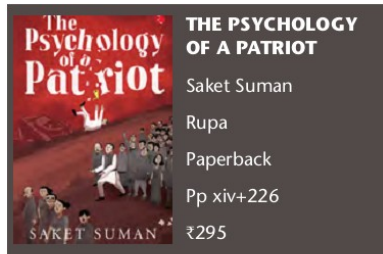


Are you a patriot?

An introspection of the current turbulent times when Indians are being asked covertly, and even overtly to prove their patriotism



At a time when some Indians are being forced to 'prove' their 'patriotism' on the streets – by self-declared populists masquerading as 'patriots' – and even being imprisoned or killed for their seeming lack of 'patriotism', here is a book that asks the crucial question to us Indians – who is a patriot.

In *The Psychology of a Patriot*, journalist Saket Suman explores India's present chaotic, divisive times through the lens of patriotism. The book examines the theory of patria or homeland, looking at its meaning as humans evolved over centuries. Early on, however, the book also acknowledges how the concept can, and has been misused to gain power. "Waving of flags and chanting of anthems, remaining oblivious to changing times and making superficial gestures are how patriots are defined now." The book reiterates the point that patriotism is a fairly recent word, is not the same as nationalism, despite similarities, and it does not go well with religion.

While the initial exploration of the idea of Indian patriotism as an anti-colonial force is recounted, even as a struggle ensued to define the word in the Indian context. Suman, pointing out that "the rise of patriotism is not about individuals but rather about the masses", credits Gandhi's leadership of the Congress for making it "a reality in India" and the effective use of democratic and human rights issues to unite the struggle.

The book reminds us of crucial theoretical constructs of independent

India, right from the framing of the Indian constitution, which "describes in great detail the relationship the State shares with its people. This is the premise from which Indian patriotism derives its meaning." The reminder is of a free nation whose citizens could think freely. Through the prism of freedoms, the book traces the lives and times of three prominent Indians – Romila Thapar, Shashi Tharoor and Arundhati Roy – shining the spotlight on unprecedented rights provided for Indians by the constitution, including ensuring it would not be a majoritarian state, especially in the light of



Gandhi is credited with getting more Indians to identify themselves as patriots

a painful partition. "If the freedom struggle was a yearning for independence, patriotism thereafter symbolised the struggle to retain the solemn bond people formed with the patria".

The book looks at how the promise was renewed at the time of the 1962 war with China, and Indira Gandhi's efforts at subverting the constitution and its long-term impacts. Writing in the context of the emergency she imposed, Suman stresses, "We need to constantly remind ourselves that

our patriotism is not that we blindly surrender in the hero-worship of any given leader, but it instead is the manifestation of our dreams and aspirations."

The great betrayal He may as well have been writing about India's present times, examining which seems to be the real intent, with a long preamble setting the context. He befittingly points to the 'great betrayal' of hope that many Indians had bought into. The book does yeoman's service in recording some details the numerous ways in which democracy is being currently subverted, the promise, the spirit of the constitution betrayed.

There is a sense of loss, of pathos here – in sharp contrast to the general social media (whose damaging role is briefly explored) calls for 'positivity'. "It is only when there is harmony and

a sense of belonging that a country, state or civilization progresses. These are not the best of times to be optimistic... patriotism asks of us to cherish our freedom and to honour its sanctity by remembering how we became us... we need to look back and identify the reasons why we went wrong." For those yearning for a return to the values of the Indian constitution, a very timely read indeed.

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